DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 036 524 TE 001 730

AUTHOR SIZEMORE, MAMIE, ED.; BLOSSOM, GRACE, ED.
TITLE THE FOURTH COMMUNICATION SKILL: WRITING.
INSTITUTION ARIZONA ENGLISH TEACHERS ASSOCIATION, TEMPE.
PUB DATE OCT 69
NOTE 6P.
JOURNAL CIT ARIZONA ENGLISH BULLETIN; V12 N1 P30-5 OCT 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.40
DESCRIPTORS *BILINGUAL EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION SKILLS, COMPOSITION (LITERARY), *COMPOSITION SKILLS (LITERARY), *ENGLISH (SECOND LANGUAGE), *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, *LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, LANGUAGE SKILLS, SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, TEACHING METHODS, TEACHING SKILLS, WRITING EXERCISES, WRITTEN LANGUAGE

ABSTRACT

THE TEACHER OF BILINGUAL STUDENTS CAN AVOID MANY PITFALLS BY EVALUATING THE STUDENT'S ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND, SPEAK, AND READ, AS WELL AS HIS ABILITY TO WRITE, AND BY GIVING WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS THAT ARE REALISTIC IN TERMS OF ULTIMATE WRITING OBJECTIVES. THE BASIC GOAL OF LEARNING ENGLISH--FOR SELF-EXPRESSION--CAN BE ACHIEVED ONLY BY PROCEEDING THROUGH A SERIES OF STEPS. THEREFORE, TEACHERS OF BILINGUAL STUDENTS MUST PLAN A PROGRAM THAT DEVELOPS WRITING HABITS THROUGH SEQUENTIAL EXERCISES BASED ON MATERIAL WHICH IS FAMILIAR TO THE STUDENT AND WHICH EMPHASIZES THE MAIN STRUCTURES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. SUCH A PLAN WOULD GUIDE STUDENTS THROUGH MANY EXERCISES FROM COPYING AND TAKING DICTATION THROUGH WRITING ANSWERS TO ORAL QUESTIONS AND CONSTRUCTING SENTENCES FROM CUE WORDS TO WRITING RESUMES AND LETTERS, AND, FINALLY, CONSTRUCTING COMPOSITIONS THAT ARE SEVERAL PARAGRAPHS LONG. ALL WRITING SHOULD BE CORRECTED BY THE STUDENT UNDER THE TEACHER'S DIRECTION, AND ORAL DISCUSSION SHOULD BE PRELIMINARY TO ANY WRITING ASSIGNMENT. (JM)

Arizona English Bulletin; Vol. 12, No. 1, October 1969

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED036524

THE FOURTH COMMUNICATION SKILL: WRITING

edited by Mamie Sizemore and Grace Blossom.

As you look back through the history of second language teaching, you find there has never been any doubt that writing is an important part of the total program. In the traditional programs it has never been omitted or even neglected as listening comprehension and speaking were. Traditionally large segments of time were allotted to writing. Most American parents are inclined not to take seriously any assignment not done with pencil and paper. Teachers require a high percentage of writing in assignments.

Even though there has been a change in the objectives of second language teaching, characterized by emphasis on the audio-lingual skills, writing continues to be important. However, as teachers, we must re-examine the relation of writing to the total language program. In the last few years we have been so concerned about the audio-lingual skills, we have tended to rely on established methods with respect to writing. There is no doubt that this aspect of the language program needs improvement as much as any other.

Very often the kinds of writing exercises the upper grade bilingual student is asked to do may have important consequences. Unfortunately, to him, they may be the only part of the program that has any consequences at all. This is because, in our schools generally and at all levels of the education system, writing is the medium through which one indicates that he knows something or has mastered one aspect of a subject. Too often it is the only medium of expression through which the upper grade and high school Indian student's achievement is evaluated or graded. If you ask teachers to explain and justify achievement grades given at intervals during a school term, they will commonly do so by references to marks they keep in a grade book. Those marks, often to the exclusion of all others, are those given for written assignments and tests. It is hardly surprising that written assignments are something to be feared by these students.

Here we should clarify two equally important points in second language teaching: (1) There is a great need to insist that teachers of Indian students be capable of adequately being able to measure forms of expression rather than writing. Teachers should evaluate how well the student understands, speaks, and reads as well as how well he writes. (2) Writing assignments should be realistic in terms of ultimate writing objectives. When you grade a student's written efforts, be sure that these efforts are related to a consistent progress in oral language mastery. If this were done teachers of Indian students might mitigate the worse features of the literacy-oriented grading system used in our schools.

TE 001 730

Writing is a derived skill. It cannot exist apart from reading and speaking. (There is a natural affinity between hearing and speaking. It is equally true that the same partnership exists between reading and writing.) Writing must come after the student has had some experience with the production of the language in the form of talk, and further experience in the form of reading. Like speaking, writing is an active skill, whereas listening and reading are passive. Writing is essentially "talk on paper," a secondary representation of sound. What many teachers do not realize is just as one can learn to understand without learning to speak, so one can learn to read without learning to write. We are firmly committed to give the students in our schools control of the four language skills. It is essential that we recognize the extent to which they will speak and write will be considerably less than the extent to which they will listen and read in the classroom.

There are two meanings to the English word "write". In beginning education it

could mean learning the motor skills of writing and to spell in the sense of making the proper choice of letters in proper sequence in response to both oral and written stimuli. It also means to put down on paper what one wishes to express, using a style and vocabulary appropriate to the material or the occasion--informal or formal, literary or technical. It is this second kind of writing that is one of the vital long-range objectives of second-language learning. We must consider the development of writing skill as a continuum just as we do the skills of listening, speaking and reading. At one end is the putting down of graphic symbols that represent language and at the other end (the ultimate goal) is writing for self-expression. With students learning another language one can only hope to attain this last objective by proceeding deliberately through a series of steps which lead toward the ultimate goal. This is not a new idea. The writing objective was just as much a part of the traditional program as it is in the most avant-garde program of today. The difference is the ways to reach the goal and the length of time necessary to achieve it.

Expressing ideas in English in written form should not have anything to do with translating from the native language. If your students do this the structures, the vocabulary, and the style of their native language will be reflected in their writing. They will seek "equivalents" in English, and having found them will revert again to their native language for the next cue. Their written efforts many times will bear little resemblance to authentic writing in English. The worst of it is that the students do not know this. This type of writing is mere busy work and does not move students forward in any way toward written self-expression in English.

So many teachers of Indian students traditionally approach the goal of self-expression in the most direct way possible; they assign a subject and expect the student to express something in writing. The results are often unacceptable to the instructor, and are a mere collection of the student's mistakes. This would not happen if the teachers would use controls so as not to extend students beyond their depths.

Teachers become very discouraged by being confronted by so many blind alleys and falling short of accomplishing the objective of good written expression. We then need to look for other, more efficient devices to teach our Indian students to write. As we discuss different devices we must keep in mind that it takes time to proceed step by small step along the continuum, and that learning to write, like learning to speak, depends upon habit-formation which requires extensive experience.

PLAN YOUR WRITING PROGRAM

As explained above a student learning English as a second language cannot proceed to reading and writing without gaining firm mechanical control of the way the sounds of English are represented on paper.

Even with older Indian students, copying exercises and frequent dictation of very familiar materials are indispensable. (Be very careful in dictating to not read so slowly that the exercises, for all practical purposes, become spelling drills.) As your students become increasingly able to respond in writing to both oral and written stimuli, they should get practice writing drill lines in response to an oral or written cue. Also, you could use writing exercises requiring such minimal structural changes as changing a verb from present to present perfect or an object pronoun from singular to plural. Example:

He writes to He has written.

He gave it to me to He gave it to us.

The next step would be to give the student the opportunity for a very limited kind of self-expression, working only with parts of sentences, as in sentence completion exercises. For example, give the first part of a sentence and the student may make up his own endings using the same basic structure. Example:

	Possible completions
John was going to try to	make better grades. finish his work get up early.

At the next level, dictation of familiar materials should continue as well as the use of written exercises requiring the manipulation of structural points. (Do you know the main structures of the English language?) The student at this stage should be able to write answers to oral questions or rejoinders to statements that he has practiced in class. To move forward a little toward self-expression he should practice constructing sentences using sentence structures and the vocabulary from his oral vocabulary. He should be given a model to follow. A good exercise is free replacement in which the student replaces underlined words but keeps the structure of the sentence intact. Example: My mother is baking a cake might be changed to Mary bought a dress. Another exercise that provides good practice is to give a model sentence such as, John looked for his sister with cues like big boy searched for money, and ask the student to construct a sentence like the model using the cues. The resulting sentence would be: The big boy searched for his money.

Another assignment would be to give a group of words from which sentences can be constructed, using the items in the order given and adding words where necessary. It is best to give an example. You might use to go, ball game, with, and friend. Such sentences as follow could be constructed:

I'm going to the ball game with friends.
She went to the ball game with her friends.
They often went to the ball game with their friends.

Some original ideas used by a teacher of Indian students was to give them a paragraph to rewrite using a different person or tense; to change a description of a scene in winter to summer; or to change some element in a dialogue. One humorous assignment was a short article about a woman buying potatoes; the students were asked to change the "potatoes" to "eggs," and make all other necessary changes. A narrative might be changed into dialogue or vice versa. Give just the skeleton of a dialogue and ask the students to expand it. Or, this is an excellent one, the students could complete a paragraph from which all the verbs have been omitted.

Obviously, as mentioned above, all writing exercises ought to be based on material which has either been practiced orally or read, preferably both. This allows the student to use structure and vocabulary that he has already learned.

At the next level, some of the same types of exercises which become progressively longer and more difficult are useful. However, at this point, the paragraph should become the basic unit of writing practice and more progress should be made toward greater freedom of expression.

One kind of exercise which you could use at this point is called dicto-comp; it combines some of the strictness of dictation with some of the freedom of composition. A passage--say, a paragraph--is presented orally to the class several times, and the students are asked to give it back exactly as they can, using the original words of the passage as much as they can, and their own only when necessary. This sort of exercise should not be confused with summary writing. The object here is not merely to state the most important ideas of the passage read, but to give back as many of its details as possible. A good summary is shorter than the original, whereas a good dicto-comp is near the same length.

The teacher can write his own passage to use, or select one to fill his needs. If he writes his own, he can emphasize grammatical constructions he has been teaching, or new words. Passages from stories the class has read may be chosen for their content as well as for their structure or organization, and the use of such passages will encourage students to read their assignments more carefully.

Another writing exercise appropriate for this same level is directed narration. This exercise could start with a sentence that sets up a situation: "Think of the trip that you have taken that you enjoyed most". The student is told what information to provide: "Tell where you went, why and when you went there, who went with you, how you made the trip, how long it took, what unusual things happened, etc." Cued narration, which gives a first sentence followed by a series of cues on which additional sentences are to be constructed, is also an excellent exercise. Give a first sentence such as: Last week Mark and I decided to go to Gallup. The cue words could be to be lucky, bus, highway, stand in line, movie, hamburger and a malt, Pepsi, hurried. A brief dialogue could be given. The students could then be asked to write a narrative paragraph leading up to the dialogue and another following it. Each paragraph should contain 50 to 75 words and have five or six complete sentences.

Fill-in exercise can be used. Have your exercise consist of three paragraphs. The first paragraph should have fewer blanks than the second. In the third paragraph, just the first and last sentences are given and the students fill in with four or five sentences.

Some teachers have found suitable exercises at this level include answering a series of seven or eight questions. Then students combine and summarize their answers to the questions to form a paragraph. Other good exercises are changing a dialogue to a letter, or a narrative to a dialogue; summarizing a particular section of reading material in 100-125 words.

It is very important for you to remember that you must know the extent of your students' knowledge of the structure and vocabulary of English at each level of teaching writing. You must realize that they may be limited in written expression by their experience with what may be called semantic range. They may still need to use models (much longer than you think) and some kinds of controls so that they are not led into producing language not in accord with the usage of native writers or not culturally authentic.

At this same level there is one step toward the ultimate writing goal that may be taken. You may start pointing out to the students some of the differences which distinguish written style from that of the spoken language. Students can be given practice in observing those differences in their own writing. We are a literacy minded society. In all cultures where literacy is valued there is a feeling that what people say is somehow inferior to what they write. (This is why the audio-

lingual method of teaching a second language has run into opposition from educators.) There are certain conventions in the written language which must be controlled, since that is the kind of writing to which prestige is attached. You, as a teacher, must be aware of these differences and call them to the attention of your students. These are not usually acquired unconsciously in second language learning. They should be stressed in connection with writing assignments.

At the next level, the fourth discussed in this bulletin, writing exercises may be longer--two or three paragraphs rather than one--and the controls fewer. The students may be asked to write a paragraph based on answers to questions about something he has read. The questions should become more and more general until finally a free topic based on the reading is given as a writing exercise.

Writing précis or résumés, either from something read, or something listened to, is one of the best ways to develop skill in writing.

There can be some practice in letter-writing to a friend or relative. However, students should first be given any information needed about the cultural conventions of letter writing as well as proper form. The lack of such instructions was evident when a young Navajo student wrote to the superintendent of a large school and the salutation he used was: "Dear Charley".

As the student's gain-in-skill in listening and speaking brings greater comprehension, and production of longer sequences starts to be reflected in his writing, he may be given more freedom. Writing should be based on what is known and should be a logical outcome of experience in listening, speaking, and reading. One of the greatest pitfalls to writing at this level, and where Indian students fail miserably, occurs when teachers give assignments which have to do with literacy analysis, appreciation and criticism. Most of your upper grade and even some high school bilingual students are not ready to imitate with any security the highly individualized forms of real authors. Many are not ready to do "creative writing" in English. His appreciation of writing as a fine art will continue to be derived from his reading. It is essentially from the books he reads that he derives the material--the vocabulary, the structures, the turn of phrase, even the practices of punctuation--which he has to have to write. You or your students should not have any feeling of inferiority because of this. It is best to seek high quality in more modest assignments.

Two final points should be made here about writing. The first one seems obvious but is often disregarded. All writing should be corrected by the student under the teacher's direction. The student needs to have his mistakes pointed out to him as soon as possible after he has made them and he benefits most by correcting them himself. It is probably better to give fewer writing assignments and go over them carefully than to assign many and give them only a cursory glance. Keep in mind a satisfying experience with one paper is worth more than frustration with six. The student does not improve his skill without the guidance of a skillful teacher. The teacher will have to use his own judgment about what should be rewritten. Surely there are some students who would benefit from being required to rewrite at least their most unsatisfactory efforts.

A second point to be stressed is the use of oral discussion as a preliminary to a writing assignment. This may forestall many errors in writing that are most likely to occur. Too many teachers spend too much time correcting mistakes which could be prevented by effective oral work.

Here seems an appropriate place to air a pet peeve of many English teachers: the use of multiple choice, short answers, and true and false questions in tests. Like all the other skills, writing as expression should be tested by the use of the skill itself. As we study and learn more about the teaching of writing, we will find better ways to teach the skill. At the moment, the first advice is to use the same kinds of exercises in a test as were used to teach the skill. Since written tests are so important, for grades, it is only fair to test the student on what he has been prepared for. He is not likely to be able to write an acceptable paragraph in English if he has never had any practice in paragraph instruction. Neither is he likely to feel any great satisfaction if he practices writing good paragraphs and all his tests require him to do is to make check marks beside a list of possible answers.